



## Collaboration or Cooperation?

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**Learning Objective:** The student will be able to define and understand the use of the terms “collaboration” and “cooperation” as a leader.

In the National Fire Academy course “New Fire Chief III: Contemporary Issues” (NFC III: CI), there is a segment regarding how collaboration and cooperation work in an agency. There is a simple but important distinction between the two words.

**Collaboration** is defined as when at least two parties are working toward a common goal. It comes from the Latin word that translates to “labor together.” Some examples include:

- The fire department and the local school work together to establish a fire safety training program for teachers.
- The fire department and the police department work together to create a joint program to encourage all drivers to wear seat belts at all times.

**Cooperation** is defined as when each member of the team openly works toward a common purpose or benefit but there is no expectation of shared work (quid pro quo). This act of cooperation does not necessarily include actual labor but more the spirit of working toward a shared and common goal. The cooperation may be subtle or indirect without direct intervention. Some examples are:

- The fire department provides a training program for proper use of automated external defibrillators for heart attack victims using the same procedure recommended by Red Cross and the American Heart Association.
- The fire department distributes the identical crime safety messages and materials that the police department shares with citizens.

As you can see, the terms are very similar. The main difference is that when you collaborate, everyone works together on the same objective. With cooperation, you both share a belief and commitment to the same objective, but you provide support in a variety of ways that does not necessarily include labor or physically working together.

In the best of situations, you should both collaborate and cooperate at the same time for the maximum benefit and best results!

For more information on the NFC III: CI course, visit <https://apps.usfa.fema.gov/nfacourses/catalog/details/10599>.